

COSMOPOLITAN CHRONICLE

True tales from the annals of history, archaeology, construction, and
restoration of the Casa de Bandini and Cosmopolitan Hotel.
Old Town San Diego State Historic Park

VOL. III. No. 14

SAN DIEGO, ALTA CALIFORNIA, JUNE 12, 2009

PRICE: FREE

A Landmark Saved: Couts Preservation Work

Ellen L. Sweet

Historian

Despite legal problems to clear title to the Casa de Bandini and the rest of block 451, Cave J. Coutts, Jr. continued to work on restoring his family home. Like the Guajome chapel, Coutts' work on Casa de Bandini was to be a memorial to his mother, Ysidora Bandini. An article in the *San Diego Union*, June 29, 1930, titled "Bandini House Work Nears Completion," stated that Coutts was then starting to work on the adjoining garage which would accommodate thirty "machines." Furthermore, "the old well on Juan street, famous in days gone by, is being rebricked and will be used for irrigation purposes." Coutts claimed that the well "once furnished water to all San Diego . . . and if the present water troubles end disastrously, I think I can help out with an almost limitless supply of good fresh drinking water from that well!"

When the work on the Casa de Bandini was ending, Coutts began work in 1931, along with other pioneers and friends, on

El Campo Santo in Old Town. The old graveyard had been sorely neglected and efforts were made to try to identify as many graves as possible. Coutts served as honorary chair of the group that included George Marston, Winifred Davidson, Tommy Getz, Milton P. Sessions, Mrs. Claus Spreckels, Mayor John F. Forward, Jr., Cliff May, and others.

In May 1932 Coutts worked with the State Park Commission and signed the registration for the Casa de Bandini as a California Historical Point of Interest. He was also instrumental in acquisition of land for the new Palomar State Park that same year, again working with George Marston.

Other related preservation efforts of Cave J. Coutts included restoration work on Pala Mission, establishing El Camino Real, beautification of the Old Town Plaza, repairing the County Courthouse, preserving the San Luis Rey bell, and promoting tourism in the north county area. Most of these projects dated from 1939-1940 at a time when Coutts was in his 80s.

Perhaps the last project that interested Coutts was a plan to create an international center

in Old Town with the Casa de Bandini as the keystone. It was to be restored and other buildings to be constructed to fill out the rest of the city block. "El Pueblito Centro Internacional" was featured in the *San Diego Union*, January 21, 1940. Nothing seems to have come of this project. In July and August 1942 there was talk of army occupation of his land in Old Town. Finally, Cave J. Coutts, Jr., who was known as the "Last of the Dons" and who had been instrumental in preserving much of Old Town, passed away in July 1943.



*Photo of Cave J. Coutts, courtesy of the
Historian's Office, San Diego County
Department of Parks and Recreation*

